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RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL TRACTS.

NO. 2. *Series-1.*

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RHODE ISLAND
HISTORICAL TRACTS

NO. 2.

VISITS OF THE NORWEGIANS

to

RHODE ISLAND,

by

ALEXANDER FARNUM.

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OF THE
N O R T H M E N
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THE following essay, prepared originally to be read before a private club of gentlemen in this city, appeared subsequently in the Providence Daily Journal of December 2nd, 1869. The publisher of this tract can in no better way introduce it than by quoting from the paragraphs of the editor of the Journal in presenting the essay to his readers: "The question whether the Northmen discovered America in the tenth century will always have a peculiar fascination for the natives of this State, for if the Sagas which recount their adventurous voyages are to be accepted as essentially historic it was in all probability by the shores of Narragansett Bay that they built their booths, and found the grapes of which they give such marvellous accounts. The truth of these narratives has been defended on grounds which only exposed them to additional criticism, and the merited ridicule heaped upon Dighton Rock and the Old Stone Mill has stood in the way of the acceptance of much that rested on secure historic credence. The elaborate discussion of the subject on our first page was read by a gentleman of this city before a private literary club, and in compliance with our urgent solicitation he allows us to print an essay which by its acute dissection of evidence and thoroughness of research amply merits publication in a more permanent form than the columns of a daily newspaper. We feel assured that no one can give a careful reading to this essay without yielding assent to its conclusions."

THE NORTHMEN IN RHODE ISLAND.

It is generally assumed that the authentic history of the Western Hemisphere begins on that day in October, 1492, when Christopher Columbus first stepped upon its soil. For upwards of a century, however, we have had access to a body of evidence which, candidly and carefully examined, creates at least a strong probability that the hardy adventurous Northman anticipated the discovery by nearly five hundred years. In this vindication of the Northman's claim to priority, we by no means dim the brightness of Columbus's fame, nor in any degree lessen the merit which all accord to the bold enterprise of the Genoese navigator. Blind chance first threw the Northman on the shores of this new world, and he conceived that he had but extended the limits

of Europe. Columbus, despite all previous experience, turned the prows of his vessels due west in search of the east, and ploughed the waters of a sea of unknown extent and danger in obedience to his firm conviction that the earth was a navigable sphere. Nothing can diminish the homage which all men gladly pay to the genius and character of one who could reach such a conclusion in the dim light of the fifteenth century, and who, in the face of doubt and ridicule and every sort of discouragement, would stake his life on the truth of his convictions. That he unexpectedly added a new continent to the map of the world was a just reward, and we can only lament that he died in ignorance of the real grandeur of his achievement.

It has been suggested that Columbus himself was to some degree indebted to the Northman for his belief in the existence of land beyond the sea, because in 1477, while revolving in his own mind the problem of a new route to Asia, he visited Iceland where the Saga narratives of the Vinland voyages were carefully preserved. That Columbus knew of the traditions of Leif and Thorfinn, or even saw the

manuscript accounts of them is possible, but not the faintest trace of such knowledge appears in any word or act of his subsequent career, when certainly he was not likely to neglect any argument which could strengthen his appeal for assistance.

By the historians of this country the traditions of its ante-Columbian discovery have been deemed of too little importance to merit a careful investigation, and their truth has consequently been doubted or altogether denied.

Robertson confines his observations on the subject to a note in which he states his belief, that the claims of the Norwegians in this regard are better founded than those of the Spanish, Germans, or Welsh; but adds that he "has not sufficient acquaintance with the literature of the north to examine into the case." Irving also dismisses the matter in a note, in which he states that the "subject appears still to be wrapped in much doubt and obscurity," and that so far as "he has had experience in tracing these early discoveries of portions of the New World, he has generally found them very confident deductions from very vague and questionable facts, that most of these

accounts when divested of the erudite comments of their editors, prove little better than the traditionary fables respecting the imaginary islands of St. Borondon and of the seven cities." He admits, however, that the accounts of the Scandinavian voyages have no inherent improbability. Hildreth, with great brevity and greater inaccuracy, says simply, that "it is conjectured on the strength of an old Icelandic ballad, that Danish adventurers from Iceland reached the North American coasts, but that the alleged visit rests on evidence of too mythic a character to find place in authentic history." Palfrey gives the substance of the Saga narratives, but advances no decided opinion as to their truthfulness; and adds, that "their antiquity and genuineness appear to be well established, nor is there anything to bring their credibility into question, beyond the general doubt which always attaches to what is new or strange:" a somewhat inconsistent statement, for if they are of well established antiquity they can hardly be called new, and if they are characterized by no inherent incredibility, one would scarcely say they were strange. Mr. Bancroft, however, has no

hesitation in giving an opinion on the question. He attributes the claim of the Northmen to the pride of an Icelandic historian, and adds, in his first edition, that "the belief rests only on a narrative traditional in form and obscure in meaning; that the geographical details are so vague that they cannot even sustain a conjecture," and more to the same effect; closing with this remarkable statement: "The first discoveries in Greenland were in a high northern latitude. Vinland was but another and more southern portion of the same extensive territory." A most extraordinary conclusion, but one which he states in a note "was forced upon him by a perusal of the Saga itself in the Latin version." Probably his next perusal of the Saga rose to the dignity of an examination, for this paragraph disappears from the later editions of his history; in which also some other changes are made in his remarks on this subject, not altering their general character and not increasing their accuracy, as for instance, when he substitutes "mythological in form" for "traditional in form," in characterizing the accounts in which there is not the slightest mythological element.

We do not now consider the question whether the Northmen were the first, or the only ante-Columbian discoverers of America. Vague allusions to the existence of a western continent are pointed out in the writings of the ancients, and in the works of Arabian geographers. On the authority of traditions equally vague, it has been argued that Spanish, Venetian, German, Welsh, and Irish navigators made trans-Atlantic voyages. Of almost every discovery or invention, it is safe to premise that some authority or reason can be found or suggested for supposing that the Chinese had therein anticipated the rest of the world by several centuries; and recently an essay has appeared which attempts to prove, on the authority of the records of Buddhist priests, that as early as the sixth century our Pacific coasts were well known to the Chinese, and that distinct traces of Asiatic civilization exist among some of the nations and tribes of South America. That in pre-historic times there must have been an extensive emigration from northwestern Europe to America, which stretched down the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi, has been inferred from the close

resemblances which exist between numerous earth-works, sepulchral tumuli, implements of flint, stone and pottery, found in those localities, and similar structures and fragments which are met with especially in the countries bordering on the German Ocean and Baltic Sea. But Mr. E. G. Squier, whose studies make him an authority in such matters, is of the opinion that such similarities are no greater than will always be found between the monuments and works of all peoples, however widely they may be separated, at corresponding periods of development. On all these points the evidence is of too indefinite a character to enable us to reach any satisfactory conclusion. We propose to discuss briefly the nature, reliability, and extent of the evidence which indicates that five hundred years before the first expedition of Columbus, voyagers from Iceland and Greenland reached the northeastern shores of this continent, explored its coasts, and established short-lived colonies probably within the borders of Rhode Island.

As to the nature of the evidence, we may accept Mr. Bancroft's statements that it is traditional in

form, but not that it is obscure in meaning, except in minor details. The beginnings of history are necessarily traditional, and within proper limits, tradition is a safe basis for historical discussion. To eliminate from our knowledge of the past all that we derive from tradition, and to accept as trustworthy only what rests upon contemporaneous record, would essentially narrow the limits of our information concerning the earliest condition of mankind, and would render many historical problems insoluble. The value of a tradition must be estimated from the nature of the events of which it tells and of the channels through which it is transmitted, and from the time which elapsed before it became written history. If we find a distinct, coherent account of an event in no way improbable in itself, transmitted through a people to whom no motive for falsifying the account can be attributed and among whom certain classes cultivated to an extraordinary degree the art of memory, which was recorded in a manuscript of undoubted authenticity long before there could have existed any reason for inventing fictitious statements, a manuscript now open to our inspection and

giving this particular account in connection with many others of accepted historical truth, we shall certainly run little hazard in receiving the main features of such an account as absolute facts. All these conditions are fully satisfied by the Saga narratives of the voyages to Vinland of the sons of Eric the Red, and of Thorfinn Karlsefne.

At first sight it seems a remarkable circumstance that nine centuries ago, when the literature of continental Europe presents so little of value or interest, we should find on the remote inhospitable shores of Iceland, a body of men who carefully studied the past and closely observed the present, and whose recollections when committed to record on the introduction of Christianity and the art of writing became at once an historical literature such as hardly any contemporary nation of Europe could rival. Outside that isolated region it was the clergy who taught and wrote of saint, martyr or miracle, or the romancist, with the sole intent to amuse, who told of chivalric knight, or sang of fairies and enchantments. In Iceland a different demand created a different supply. An explanation of this curious character-

istic of the people of this island may be found in the history of its settlement. The earliest recorded discovery of Iceland is dated about 860. A few years later in order to escape the tyranny of Harald Haarfager, some of the petty chiefs of Norway sought for themselves, their families, and retainers, a new home in that distant island. The example was contagious, and so great was the exodus, that King Harald issued an edict forbidding farther emigration. But the daring impetuous Viking, accustomed to a roving life, and unused to restraint, was not to be stopped by kingly mandates, and in the course of half a century Iceland became quite generally colonized. The great expense attending the outfit for so long a voyage prevented all but the more wealthy, and such as chose to follow in their train, from attempting to escape the imperious sway of Harald. Thus Iceland was settled by a body of rich independent chiefs, each the peer of the others, and each establishing himself in such portion of unoccupied territory as best pleased him. Contrary to the general rule, these emigrants were of the best blood of Norway, and were as a whole superior to those

who remained in the mother country, a circumstance to be distinctly kept in mind, if we would understand the subsequent political, social, and intellectual history of the island. A republic at once patriarchal and aristocratic was established, but the dissensions naturally arising where there were so many of equal pretensions to rule soon compelled the infant State to elect one of supreme authority in dispensing law. One having been chosen, he was sent to Norway, where for three years he studied the laws and customs of the parent country. On his return he was elected presiding officer of the great annual assembly of the people, called the Thing, under the title of the Promulgator of Laws, and it was part of his duty to recite annually from memory the entire legal code. In a State so constituted disputed points were mainly settled by precedent, and for nearly two centuries the art of memory was the chief reliance in enacting administering and transmitting laws.

In the amusements of the people of Iceland that art played an important part. The little that was transpiring within their own narrow borders offered

but a meagre field for intellectual exercise, and communication with the great world they had left being difficult and dangerous, they had little knowledge of, or interest in, its constantly changing scenes. In their peaceful pursuits of agriculture and fishing, they found more opportunity than reason for mental activity, and the monotonous life of their island home stood in marked contrast with the stirring events of which the fathers of the colony could tell. Thus amid this isolation their thoughts naturally reverted to the events of the past, and almost inevitably there sprung up a fondness for hearing of its glories. At the various gatherings of the people, and on the long winter evenings in the family circle, it soon came to be the chief amusement to listen to the story of the exploits of their ancestors, which some one of their number was deputed to pronounce. So thoroughly did a love for this species of entertainment become ingrained in the life of this people, that modern civilization with its printing press has failed to eradicate it. In 1809 William Jackson Herker, Fellow of the Wernerian Society of Edinburgh, travelled through Iceland, and in 1811

printed for private circulation a Journal of his tour. In that volume appears this paragraph: "With regard to the amusements of the Icelanders they are not of a kind to dispel the gloomy habit which continually hangs about them, and indeed they are almost entirely confined to the reading or repeating to one another their ancient Sagas." So Henderson in the account of his travels in Iceland tells us, that "no sooner does the day close, than the whole patriarchal family, domestics and all, are seated on their couches in the principal apartment, from the ceiling of which the reading and working lamp is suspended, and one of the family reads some favorite Sagas;" and that, "from the scarcity of printed books, in some families the Sagas are recited by those who have committed them to memory, and there are still instances of itinerant orators who gain a livelihood during the winter by going from house to house and repeating the stories they have learned."

Thus naturally did the Icelanders become imbued with a love of history, and there being no means of gratifying this taste except through the recitations of others, we see how inevitably did there spring into

existence that celebrated race of Icelandic Skalds and Sagamen, the most favored associates of Scandinavian Kings, through whose unerring memories the traditions of the past and the story of the present were transmitted from generation to generation with wonderful accuracy. We, who are accustomed to the methods of modern civilization, can hardly appreciate the power of oral tradition in transmitting through a succession of ages accurate accounts of important events. But when we consider the origin, character and surroundings of the Icelanders, and that they had this established order of men whose sole business it was to observe, remember, and relate, and who thus brought their mnemonic powers to the highest possible state of perfection, it is not too much to expect that in the local traditions of this people we have genuine historical truths.

With the introduction of Christianity into Iceland in the year 1000, came a knowledge of the Roman alphabet and of the art of writing. As was natural, among a people with the tastes of the Icelanders, almost the first use made of the new art was to record the songs and stories of the Skald and Saga-

man, and within two centuries Iceland had an historical literature which, in the words of another, "even now imparts a lustre to that barren land." It was within this period, that is from the middle of the eleventh to the middle of the thirteenth century, that the Sagas on which we rely in this investigation emerged from their traditionary state in the memory of the Sagamen, into that of written history as we find them recorded in manuscripts which have come down to our own age; a period long anterior to the time when the discoveries of Columbus startled all Europe, and when no conceivable motive could have existed for inventing accounts of fictitious voyages. Nor could bare fictions have gained credence among a people and during an age which produced the *Landnamabok*, the *Islendingabok*, and the *Heimskringla*.

With these few observations on the nature and the general trustworthiness of the Sagas, we pass to the third point, namely, the extent of the evidence in support of the claim of the Northmen to be considered the discoverers of America, with such incidental observations as to its authenticity as the examination may suggest.

It is neither possible nor desirable to give all the accounts which have come to us relating to these Vinland voyages. Two Sagas stand in especial prominence, those of Leif the son of Eric, and of Thorfinn Karlsefne. These two are much the most interesting in many respects, aside from their greater fullness of detail. Leif, though not the discoverer, was the first to land on these shores and attempt a settlement, while Thorfinn, though later, led a larger and more important expedition, remained longer, and is moreover a well known historical personage of illustrious descent, whose family in our own time is represented in the persons of Finn Magnusson the Icelandic scholar, and Thorwaldsen the sculptor. Another consideration which gives especial importance to the Saga of Thorfinn is that it was written in Iceland, while those of the sons of Eric originated in Greenland, thus giving us independent accounts of certain events, agreeing in all main particulars, but with certain discrepancies in minor details which would not have appeared in fabricated accounts, but which have a most simple and natural explanation in their different origin. In the Royal Library of

Copenhagen is preserved the Codex Flatoiensis, a vellum manuscript executed between the years 1387 and 1395. On its first page is a table of contents from which we learn that it contains, "first, songs; then how Norway was inhabited or settled; then of Eric Vidforla; thereafter of Olaf Tryggvesson and all his deeds; then next the Saga of King Olaf the saint and all his deeds, and therewith the Sagas of the Orkney Earls; then the Saga of Leverrer; and thereafter the Saga of Hakon the Old, with the Sagas of King Magnus and his son; then are the deeds of Einar Sökkesson of Greenland, thereafter of Helge, and Ulf the Bad; then begin annals from the time the world was made, showing all to this present time that is come." Included in the Saga of Olaf Tryggvesson are the Sagas of Eric the Red, and his sons Leif, Thorwald and Thorstein. From these we learn that Eric and his father fled from Norway to Iceland in consequence of murder. In Iceland Eric married and had sons. Becoming involved in some conflicts he was outlawed by the Thing in 982 and determined to go westward in search of the land which, a century before, had been seen by one Gunn-

biorn. Fitting out a vessel he sailed for the unknown region, which he found and called Greenland, hoping by its attractive name to induce settlements. After remaining three years in Greenland he revisited Iceland, and in 985 again sailed for Greenland, inducing a large number to follow to his new country. Among his companions was one Heriulf, whose son Biarne was at the time absent in Norway. During the same summer Biarne returned to Iceland, and hearing of his father's departure determined to seek him in this new country called Greenland. The account proceeds, Biarne speaking: "Our expedition will be thought foolish, as none of us have ever been on the Greenland sea before. Nevertheless they set out to sea as soon as they were ready, and sailed for three days until they had lost sight of the land they had left. But when the wind failed a north wind set in with a fog, and they knew not where they were sailing to, and this lasted many days. At last they saw the sun, and could distinguish the quarters of the sky; so they hoisted sail again and sailed a whole day and night when they made land." In this simple statement we

conclude that the Western Hemisphere makes its first appearance in history. If the account stopped here, it would of course be impossible to locate these wandering mariners on the map of the world, but the details of their subsequent movements enable us to form a reasonable conjecture as to their position. The narrative proceeds: "They spoke among themselves about what land this could be, and Biarne said that in his opinion it could not be Greenland. They sailed close up to the land and saw that it was without mountains, covered with wood and small hills inland. They left the land on the larboard side and sailed two days and nights before they got sight of land again. This land being flat and covered with trees, Biarne also thought could not be Greenland." Refusing to go on shore, Biarne ordered the sails to be hoisted, and turning the ship's bow from the land, they sailed for three days and nights with a fine breeze from the south west. Then they saw a third land which was high and mountainous. Coasting along this shore they found that it was an island. Then they turned from the land and stood out to sea with the same

breeze. But the gale increased and Biarne ordered a reef to be taken and not to sail harder than the ship and her tackle could bear. After sailing four days, for the fourth time they made land. This shore seeming to answer the descriptions of Greenland, they came to anchor and found themselves among their friends." Now whoever will trace the course of Biarne on the map, bearing in mind that he sailed from the southern part of Iceland in a westerly direction, that after losing sight of land a northerly breeze sprung up, before which, still struggling westward he ran many days, until he saw a coast without mountains covered with woods, that turning the ship about and keeping the land on his left, or in other words laying his course to the northeast, and sailing two days and nights until he saw another land, flat and covered with trees, again turning the ship's bow out to sea and sailing three days and nights with a fine southwest breeze when he saw a third shore along which he coasted until it proved to be an island, turning again to the open sea with a wind from the same quarter but of increased violence, before which he ran four days

until he reached Greenland, can hardly resist the conclusion that the first land seen was some point on the coast of New England, the second, Nova Scotia, and the third the island of Newfoundland. The description of the countries seen, their distances and directions from each other, correspond very accurately with the real conditions and situations of those localities, and cannot well be referred to any other headlands on our coast, unless we are greatly deceived in the distance accomplished in a day's sail, which we have the best reasons for believing to be, with a fair wind, not far from one hundred miles.

This account of Biarne however has its chief interest and importance in the expeditions to which it gave rise. Without the testimony of subsequent explorers, its statements would have attracted little attention and Columbus would have been left alone in his glory. And in turn without this account of Biarne's voyage, we should have much less confidence in the supposed identification of the points at which Leif, Thorwald and Thortinn made their landings. The reports of Biarne and his companions of the unknown lands they had seen excited much com-

ment, but for nearly fifteen years no attempt was made to revisit them. About the year 1000, however, Leif, the eldest son of Eric, determined upon a voyage of exploration, and having bought the vessel of Biarne, with a company of thirty-five men among whom were undoubtedly some who had been engaged in the earlier expedition, sailed in the direction in which the mysterious lands had been seen. The account of this voyage, which we condense as much as possible, proceeds as follows: "They sailed out into the sea when they were ready and found that land first which Biarne had found last. On landing they found a country destitute of attractions, and calling it Helluland, or the land of flat stones, they returned to their ship and sailed out to sea and saw another land. Going on shore they found this territory flat, well wooded, with white sands far around where they went, and a low shore. Then said Leif, this land shall be named for its qualities, and it shall be called Markland or Woodland. Then they returned to the ship and sailed into the open sea with a northeast wind and were two days at sea before they saw land, and they sailed thither and

came to an island which lay to the eastward of the mainland. Returning from the island to their ship they sailed into a channel between the island and a promontory which ran out to the eastward from the mainland. Holding on their course they saw much ground laid dry at ebb tide, and at last went on shore at a place where a river, which came from a lake, fell into the sea. They brought the ship through the river into the lake and anchored. Here they resolved to remain for the winter and built booths."

That Leif and his companions were now in Mount Hope Bay we have fair grounds for believing, if we may receive the statement of the Saga that the first land seen by Leif was that which was last seen by Biarne, and which we found good reason to suppose was Newfoundland. If this be true, the Markland of Leif was Nova Scotia. Thence two days' sail brings him to Cape Cod, by which he sails to the island of Nantucket, thence through Nantucket Bay, over the shoals, through Vineyard Sound, across the mouth of Buzzard's Bay to the mouth of Pocasset River, up which they work the vessel into Mount

Hope Bay. * * * Plenty of fish were found in the river and lake, and the nature of the country was so good that cattle would not require house feeding, for there came no frost, and little did grass wither; facts which none but a native of Greenland would be likely to predicate of a Rhode Island winter. The narrative continues: "Day and night were more equal than in Greenland or Iceland, for on the shortest day the sun was above the horizon between the Eyktarstad and Dagmalastad." The true meaning of this expression is somewhat doubtful, but Prof. Rafn and Finn Magnussen, than whom none are better qualified to judge, interpret it as saying that the sun rose at $7\frac{1}{2}$ A. M., and set at $4\frac{1}{2}$ P. M., and consequently the latitude of the spot at which the observation was made is nearly that of Mount Hope Bay. But though these Sagas are undoubtedly substantially true, it may not be safe to accept their statements as the basis of an accurate astronomical calculation.

Leif divided his command into two companies, to be in turn employed in exploring the surrounding country. One day the exploring party returned

without one of their number named Tyrker. He was soon found, but he appeared under some strange influence, as he was talking German, rolling his eyes and twisting his mouth. The cause of his excitement was soon found to be that he had found vines and grapes, and was overcome with joy at the sight of a fruit which so strongly reminded him of the land of his birth in southern Europe. This discovery gave to this fair region the name Vinland. In the spring of 1002 Leif with all his company returned to Greenland, where in the following winter, the Saga informs us, his father Eric died, leaving Leif at the head of the family.

Following the account of Leif's voyage is an account of an expedition commanded by Thorvald, a younger brother of Leif, from which we extract a few incidents for the sake of their connection with the more important subsequent expedition of Thorfinn.

Thorvald thinking that Vinland had been too little explored borrowed Leif's ship and with thirty men sailed for that country. Nothing is told of their voyage until they arrived at Leif's booths where

they passed the winter of 1002-3. The following spring and summer were spent in exploring, retiring in the autumn to the booths where they lived during the winter of 1003-4. The next summer, the narrative says: "Then went Thorvald eastward with the ship and round the land to the northward. Here came a heavy storm upon them when off a ness, so that they were driven on shore, where they remained a long time and repaired their ship. Then said Thorvald, now will I, that we fix up the keel here upon the ness and call it Kialarness, and so did they." Supposing them to have started from Mount Hope Bay, their eastward and northward course would bring them on Cape Cod, which is believed to be the ness or promontory on which Thorvald repaired his vessel. Leaving this spot Thorvald coasted round to the eastern shores where in a conflict with natives called by the Northmen, Skrellingers, he lost his life, an arrow having penetrated under his arm. His companions returned to their comrades and in the spring of 1005 the entire company returned to Greenland. An account of an unsuccessful attempt of Thorstein, a third son of

Eric, to reach Vinland and bring away the body of his brother, closes the record of the sons of Eric.

We come now to the story of Thorfinn Karlsefne, the most interesting and important of the Sagas relating to Vinland, but of whose voyages we can here give only the briefest account. The manuscript from which this Saga is taken is believed with good reason to be a genuine autograph of Hank Erlendson, chief governor of Iceland in 1295, one of the compilers of the Landnama Bok, and ninth in descent from Karlsefne himself. It was found in the early part of the seventeenth century by Prof. Arnas Magnussen, a learned and patriotic Iceland, who devoted his labors and fortune to the accumulation of manuscripts illustrative of the early history of his country. It is especially important to our inquiry, in that having been written in Iceland it is an independent witness in the matter of these Vinland voyages, and in that in speaking of some persons to whom we have before been introduced, it makes some mistakes which, when we remember its origin, really become strong proofs of its authenticity.

This Saga, after giving the genealogy of Thortinn, states that one summer he proposed a voyage to Greenland and sailed with two ships and eighty men. "Nothing is told about how long they were at sea, but it is to be related that both these ships came to Eriksfiord in the autumn. *Erik* rode to the ship together with several of the inhabitants and they began to deal in a friendly manner." We have in this opening sentence an error which would not have occurred in a fabricated account, or in any Greenland manuscript. Eric died nearly four years before the arrival of Thorfinn, a circumstance of which the Icelandic narrator was ignorant, who supposed him to be still the head of his family, the chief man of Greenland, and the first to extend hospitality to the stranger. Throughout the Saga we must substitute Leif for Eric. The winter was spent in the interchange of courtesies, during which season Thorfinn became enamored of, and was wedded to Gudrid, the widow of Thorstein. In the spring, excited by the glowing accounts of the climate and products of Vinland the good, and probably prompted by his wife, who had accompanied

Thorstein in his unsuccessful attempt to recover his brother's body, Thorfinn determined on a voyage thither. An expedition was fitted out, comprising three ships and one hundred and sixty men. The Saga says that in one of the ships went *Thorvald*, the son of Eric, another error, since we know that *Thorvald Ericson* lost his life some years previous in a conflict with the natives of Vinland. In another brief account of Thorfinn's voyage, prepared in Greenland, we are told that he was accompanied by one Thorvald, who was the husband of a natural daughter of Eric, thus giving a ready explanation of this confusion of names. Furthermore, later in the Saga of Thorfinn it is related that Thorvald Ericson was killed in Vinland by an arrow shot into his bowels by a uniped, thus agreeing with the former accounts in the main fact that there was a Thorvald killed in Vinland, and by an arrow.

"They sailed south two days, then saw they land, and put off boats and explored the land, and found there great flat stones. They gave the land a name and called it Helluland. Then sailed they and turned from the south to the southeast, and found a

land covered with wood and many wild beasts upon it; an island lay there out from the land to the southeast; there killed they a bear and called the place afterward Bear Island, but the land Markland." It will be seen that the Icelandic writer was not aware that these places had been visited by Leif who had given them these names of Helluland and Markland, but supposed them to be so first designated by Thorfinn and his associates. Pursuing their voyage far to the southward, they came to a ness, the land lay upon the right, there were long sandy strands. They rowed to land and found there upon the ness the keel of a ship, and called the place Kialarness," thus reaching the spot where four years before Thorvald Ericson had repaired his ship and set up a keel and gave to it the name Kialarness, of all of which the writer of the Saga of Thorfinn was ignorant. The conjecture that this place was Cape Cod is strongly confirmed by the details of Thorfinn's subsequent movements and the description of its long sandy shores. Any further particular account of the expedition of Thorfinn and of his doings we are obliged to omit. The voyage was pursued

along coasts, by islands and headlands, through currents which correspond very perfectly with the true location and condition of Cape Cod, Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Vineyard Sound, Buzzard's Bay, Seaconnet Passage, Pocasset River, and Mount Hope Bay. Thorfinn and his companions remained some three years in the neighborhood, occupied in hunting, exploring and fishing, sometimes trading and sometimes fighting with the native Skrellingers, with great variety of incident and experience. At the end of that time they returned to Greenland, laden with the products of the country and with furs which they had obtained in trade with the natives.

In the accounts of expeditions subsequent to the time of Thorfinn, we find little that increases our knowledge of the subject, and enough has been told to enable us to form an opinion as to the reported discovery by the Northmen of portions of the New World. One can hardly read these ancient Sagas without being struck with the simplicity and apparent truthfulness of their contents. There is no attempt at speculation, no fondness for the marvel-

ous appears, but a simple setting down of facts with an air of candor which it is difficult to resist. It is apparent that we refer only to the historical Sagas. There is another class composed solely to gratify the Icelandic love of story telling and story hearing, in which the imagination is the only authority consulted, and the most marvellous tales are related; and still another, in which gods and heroes are the actors, which paints the delights and glories of Valhalla, recounts the fights and describes the feasts of Odin and his warriors, and lays all Scandinavian mythology under contribution for incident. These, though a natural outgrowth of Icelandic tastes, temperament and occupations, were composed for a distinct purpose, and make no claim to place as authentic history. In the examination of these Vinland Sagas, quite too much ingenuity has been expended in discussing trivial incidents of not the slightest importance to the general narrative. Whether the strange demeanor of Tyrker when met by the searching party was really due to intoxication, or why a whole band of hostile Skrellingers should flee in terror when faced by a single woman of Thorfinn's

company, are questions which it is not especially important for the present generation to have settled. The whole case is weakened also by an attempt to link the visit of the Northmen with Dighton Rocks and Old Stone Mills. If such supports were necessary, the whole inquiry might well be abandoned. The allusion to this newly discovered land called Vinland in the writings of Adam of Bremen and others affects the case neither way. The existence of the traditions is a palpable fact and we are only concerned with the truthfulness of the facts they relate. Claiming at the outset that there is nothing improbable in the Saga narratives of these voyages of discovery, we have stated some of the considerations to be taken into account in forming an opinion on their authenticity. From their nature, from the peculiar circumstances affecting the channels through which they reach us, from their internal evidence of truthfulness in their structure and relations to each other, we cannot avoid the conclusion that they are, in the main, an authentic account of actual events. That the localities visited by the Northmen are accurately identified can not be so absolutely asserted.

But thus much we think it safe to say, that no reason has ever been suggested why Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the coasts of New England may not be the identical spots explored, that these places do fully answer the conditions required by the Saga narratives, and that great difficulties of interpretation at once face us if we attempt to locate the Northman elsewhere on American shores. We are conscious that to all conclusions reached in reasoning on these Sagas, there may be raised the fundamental objection that the premises are inherently weak, and that little reliance can be placed on statements of time, distance, direction and the like, which perhaps for a century existed only in tradition. Under ordinary circumstances this defect might be fatal, but for reasons which we have stated we believe that this objection has not all the weight to which at first sight it seems entitled, though it is always to be borne in mind, and no judicious investigator of this subject will indulge in anything like dogmatic statements. It is well to remember too that modern researches in Greenland have vindicated the accuracy of the Sagas on many points on which their testimony had previously been doubted.

Eliminating from these curious narratives all to which the skeptical inquirer can reasonably object, enough remains to entitle the Northman to our most honorable remembrance. Braving the dangers of an unknown sea, without chart or compass, in the beginning of the eleventh century, he made repeated visits to these coasts, which we must believe he was the first to discover, where a nation of kindred descent has since wrought so glorious a chapter in the history of mankind.

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